

Report of a survey of teachers, tutors and technicians involved in the teaching of practical woodworking and furniture making



Joseph Bray, Christopher Hyde, Phillip Gullam, Gabriel Hemery

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Executive Summary

In Spring 2025, Sylva Foundation and The Furniture Makers' Company undertook a survey of teachers, tutors, and technicians involved in practical woodworking and furniture education across Great Britain. With 55 responses, this study provides a timely snapshot of the sector's current conditions, challenges, and future opportunities.

Key Findings:

1. **Demographics & Settings:** Most respondents were aged 50–59, predominantly male, and located in England, especially the south-east. The largest proportion worked in Further Education colleges, but others represented private institutions, charities, and schools.
2. **Experience & Motivation:** A majority had over 10 years of experience, often transitioning into teaching from industry careers. Many cited a passion for craftsmanship and a desire to pass on knowledge as core motivations for teaching.
3. **Qualifications & CPD:** Requirements for qualifications varied. Industry experience was often more valued than formal teaching credentials, especially outside formal education. CPD activities focused primarily on machine safety and health & safety, with less emphasis on pedagogy or digital tools. Many freelance or informal educators lacked access to structured CPD.
4. **Challenges:** Respondents identified systemic barriers, including limited funding, insufficient time for lesson planning, outdated or irrelevant curricula, and lack of recognition for the subject. Many noted the declining presence of woodworking in schools and the increasing complexity of student needs, especially around neurodiversity.
5. **Support Needs:** Teachers expressed a strong need for technical training (especially in CNC and CAD), better pedagogical support, training in neurodiversity and SEN, and stronger industry engagement. Freelancers and informal educators reported difficulty accessing support or resources.
6. **Satisfaction:** Despite the challenges, teachers found deep satisfaction in student growth, craft practice, community building, and the creative nature of their work.
7. **Woodworking Teachers Network:** 73% of respondents supported the idea of a national network. Interest focused on peer mentoring, CPD development, sharing safety practices, and widening access to the craft.

Recommendations & Next Steps:

The research underscores the urgent need to revitalise and support woodworking education. Suggested next steps include:

- Establishing a national teachers' network and working group;
- Scoping a centralised resource and collaboration platform;
- Partnering with awarding bodies to modernise qualifications;
- Developing industry, heritage, and sustainability partnerships;
- Advocating for woodworking's role in personal growth, sustainability, and future skills.

This report serves as a foundation for a sector-wide conversation about the identity, value, and future of woodworking and furniture education in the UK. The upcoming in-person seminar hosted by Sylva Foundation will build on these insights to co-design actionable strategies with the community.

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Introduction

An online survey of teachers, tutors and technicians involved in the teaching of practical woodworking and furniture making was conducted during spring 2025. This research was led by Sylva Foundation, an environmental and educational charity, in collaboration with The Furniture Makers' Company, the City of London livery company and charity for the furnishing industry.

The aim of this research was to inform future work supporting education and training in the wood-furniture sector. Findings from this research will also support a future in-person seminar for woodworking teachers hosted by Sylva Foundation, during which discussions will delve more deeply into the key findings.

Research Method

An online survey was developed, presented as a Google Form. A total of 22 questions sought to understand the respondent's age and gender, their work settings, teaching experience, and interest in networking with other professionals working in similar roles. All questions were non-compulsory, hence respondent numbers vary between different questions.

Targeted respondents were professionals working in woodworking and furniture making who were teachers, tutors and technicians. Respondents were targeted via communications delivered by both partners and invited to complete the online survey.

Results were analysed using basic statistics, mostly counts and percentages.

Results

Survey Population

A total of 55 responses were received.

Most respondents (44%) were 50-59 years old (Figure 1).

Your age
55 responses

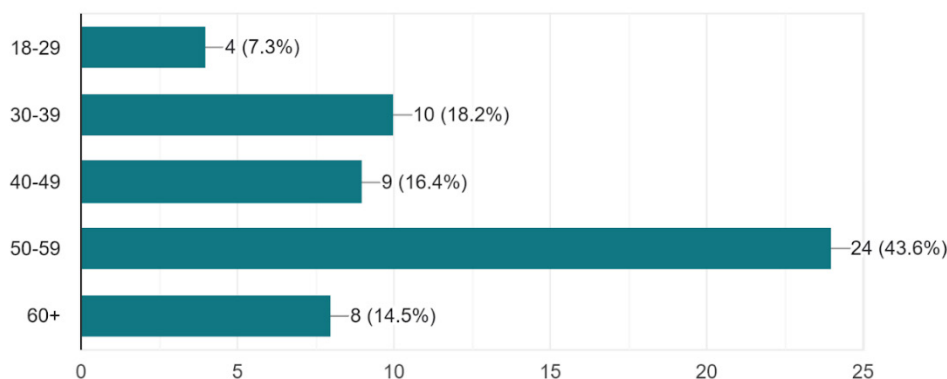


Figure 1: Age distribution of respondents

Among 54 responses, the majority of respondents 44 (82%) were male, 9 (17%) female, and 1 (2%) non-binary. One respondent preferred not to declare their gender.

Teaching Settings

All respondents (54) were located in Great Britain (Figure 2), the overwhelming majority in England (only one each in Scotland and in Wales). Within England, most were located in the south-east region.

Respondents represented a range of school or business types (Figure 3). Most respondents (21: 38%) were from a College of Further Education, followed by those employed at a private sector school (11: 20%), and a charity (10: 19%). Seven (13%) were employed at a secondary school.



Figure 2 Location of 54 respondents across Great Britain.

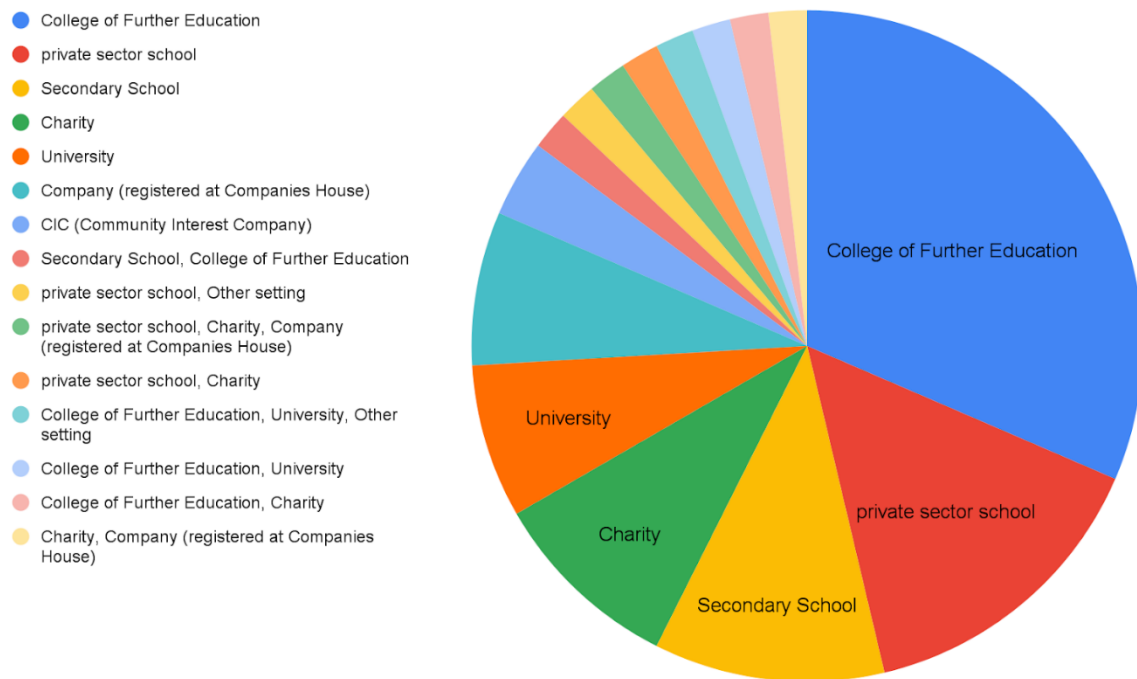


Figure 3 Proportions of different teaching setting types among 55 respondents.

Respondents provide a wide range of different courses (Figure 4). Most frequent (6 respondents) was Level 1/2 furniture making (eg City & Guilds), Level 3 furniture making (e.g. City & Guilds), followed by (5)

Undergraduate (FdA / BA(hons)) and (5) GCSE product design / resistant materials, A Level product design / 3D design. Beyond the listed options (Figure 4), other courses described by respondents included Apprenticeship, City and Guilds, BTec, UAL, T-level, diploma-level and a national Saturday club (for ages 13-16) in range of subject areas including boat building, construction and woodworking.



Figure 4 The range of courses provided among 55 respondents.

Teaching Experience

Among 55 respondents, the majority (30: 55%) has been practicing for more than 10 years. Only 2 (4%) had less than one year of experience.

The majority of respondents (56%) worked part-time to various degrees (Figure 5), while most were full-time (24: 44%).

How many days a week do you teach woodworking / furniture making?

54 responses

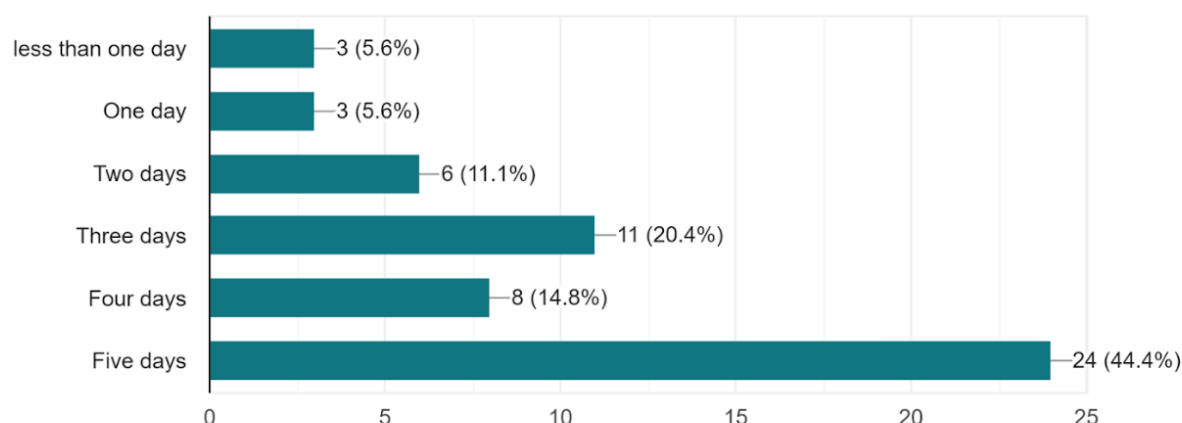


Figure 5 Counts among respondents working part-time and full-time in teaching or tutoring roles.

Motivations

We asked respondents about their motivations for becoming a teacher. Among 55 responses, many individuals transitioned into teaching as a natural progression from careers in furniture making, carpentry, design, or craftsmanship. A shared motivation was a desire to share skills, knowledge, and passion with others—often inspired by positive personal experiences with education or influential teachers. For some, teaching emerged through opportunities like evening classes, apprenticeships, or covering roles, eventually leading to full-time positions. Others were drawn by the creative, meaningful nature of teaching, the opportunity to empower students, and a wish to inspire the next generation—especially in sustaining traditional or heritage skills. Teaching also appealed as a career change, offering purpose, personal development, social interaction, and a way to support one's own practice or studio. Several also emphasised the importance of encouraging creativity, working with diverse learners, and promoting inclusivity and sustainability in the field.

Qualifications

We asked respondents whether they were expected to have any specific teaching qualifications, professional accreditation or industry experience prior to starting their teaching career. Among the 54 responses, while formal teaching qualifications were

preferred or required in structured educational settings (like colleges or secondary schools), many roles—especially in vocational, private, or informal education—focused more on demonstrated craft expertise, practical qualifications, and real-world experience. Responses are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: A summary of teaching qualifications, professional accreditation or industry experience expected prior to starting a teaching career among 54 responses.

Requirement Type	Expectation	Typical Contexts
Teaching Qualification (PGCE, Cert Ed, QTS)	Desirable; sometimes essential. Often required or expected to be completed after hiring.	Further Education (FE), Secondary Schools, Accredited Courses
Industry Experience	Frequently essential; often the most valued qualification.	All contexts, especially vocational, private workshops
Vocational Qualification (e.g., City & Guilds L3+)	Usually required at Level 3 or above.	FE colleges, Apprenticeships, Accredited Vocational Courses
Degree (BA, MA in Relevant Subject)	Often required for secondary/FE roles; less so in informal settings.	Secondary Education, HE/FE, Some Apprenticeship Programs
Assessor Qualifications (e.g., TAQA)	Required if role includes formal assessment (e.g., NVQs).	Apprenticeship delivery, FE colleges
None Specified	In some cases, no formal qualifications required beyond experience.	Evening classes, community workshops, private studios
Soft Criteria (e.g., workshop experience, people skills)	Often considered in place of formal qualifications.	Alternative education, informal learning settings
On-the-job Qualification Pathways	Some roles hire based on experience with requirement to gain Cert Ed or PGCE within a set period.	FE colleges, teaching apprenticeships

Regular training

We asked respondents about any woodwork specific, machine refresher training, CPD or any other training that they regularly undertook. Among 50 responses, Health & safety and machinery use dominated CPD activity. Formal teaching development was less common unless institutionally mandated, external industry links and independent learning were important for some respondents. A few respondents report no CPD, especially in informal or freelance roles. A summary is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Regular training undertaken by teacher respondents (50).

Category	Details / Common Activities	Frequency / Notes
Health & Safety / Machine Training	PUWER, abrasive wheels, LEV, CNC, CAD, manual handling, grinders, woodworking machinery (planer, saws, routers)	Often annual or every 5 years; standard in formal settings
Internal CPD (General)	Safeguarding, Prevent, radicalisation, First Aid, H&S inductions	Mandatory, frequent (click-through or in-person)
External Industry Engagement	Industry days, exhibitions, factory visits, guest speakers (e.g., Makita, Festool), trade shows	Varied – some annually, some informal or ad hoc
Digital Skills Development	Independent learning in CAD/CAM, digital drawing, digital manufacture	Self-driven, ongoing
Teaching & Pedagogical Training	Teaching development days, Higher Education Fellowship, Didac machining course	Less common, more ad hoc or institution-dependent
Professional Practice as CPD	Running own workshop/business, commissions, woodworking practice	Ongoing – used as informal professional development
Accredited CPD (External)	DATA machine competency training, AWGB woodturning, Activate Learning CPD	5-year cycles, subject to funding or individual initiative
Peer Learning / Informal CPD	In-house discussions, shadowing colleagues, joining refresher sessions for new staff	Irregular, but accessible
Lack of Formal CPD	Several responses mentioned no formal training, or minimal CPD beyond internal compliance modules	Often linked to limited institutional support or new in role

Support Required

We explored whether any training or support would be helpful in respondents' roles as a teacher, particularly in allowing them to develop personally and deliver better education/training to students. Among 52 respondents, machine safety and digital design were top technical priorities. Many felt underserved in pedagogical support, especially regarding diverse learners. There was strong interest in practical, real-world CPD with clear relevance to both teaching and industry. A number of self-employed or freelance educators express uncertainty about where to access training. Responses are summarised further in Table 3.

Table 3: Interest in training or support among teachers (52 respondents).

Theme	Common Requests & Concerns
Woodworking Machinery & Safety	- Refresher training (CNC, power tools, maintenance)- Train-the-trainer courses- Safe machining practices- Lack of consistent standards for refresher training
CAD / Digital Skills	- Up-to-date training in CAD/CAM- Desire for formal, certified training- Software operation (e.g., CNC interfaces)- Digital drawing/technical drawing updates
Teaching & Pedagogy	- Lesson planning, teaching strategies, classroom management- Training in engaging students and managing workload- Desire to formalize teaching skills (e.g., via PGCE or equivalent)
Neurodiversity & SEN	- Understanding and supporting neurodivergent students- Training in behaviour management and student mental health- Supporting students with additional needs effectively
Industry Engagement	- More exposure to live industry environments- Employer input into course content- Visiting studios/workshops and forming industry links
Peer Networking & Community	- Networking with like-minded educators- Professional discussions to avoid "groupthink"- Shared forums, resource libraries, or textbook development
Broader Skills & Interests	- Sustainability, modern materials, forestry-to-workshop practices- Business skills (for educators and students)- Social dynamics, community management, and grant writing- Art/craft therapy, Forest School training
Institutional Barriers & Support Needs	- Lack of time, funding, or equipment (especially CNC)- Limited subject-specific CPD vs. mandatory corporate CPD- Need for non-contact time and fair compensation- More recognition of woodwork's value in education

Satisfaction with Teaching

We asked respondents about what they enjoyed most about teaching. A range of rich and passionate responses were provided by 55 respondents, summarised as follows:

Seeing Student Growth

- a. Watching students develop confidence, master new skills, and transform ideas into physical objects
- b. The "aha!" moments when concepts finally click
- c. Witnessing learners overcome mistakes and challenges
- d. Guiding students as they discover capabilities they didn't know they had

Passion for the Craft

- a. A love for working with wood and making things
- b. Joy in sharing hands-on skills and creative problem-solving
- c. Satisfaction in continuing one's own craft practice alongside teaching

Meaningful Connections

- a. Strong relationships with students—mentorship, dialogue, shared curiosity
- b. Pride in students' success beyond the classroom—employment, exhibitions, apprenticeships
- c. Collaborating with like-minded educators, peer learning, and community building

Purpose & Fulfilment

- a. Helping others grow personally and professionally
- b. Making a positive impact and feeling the work is valuable and meaningful
- c. Providing a nurturing and grounding learning experience

Creative and Varied Work

- a. The diversity and unpredictability of each day
- b. Opportunities to develop new projects, adapt lessons, and learn from students
- c. Supporting career pathways in design, construction, and craft industries

"I enjoy the instant feedback from students... It's highly satisfying to witness them develop and produce work they are proud of."

Barriers and challenges with Teaching

We also asked respondents to reflect on the barriers and systemic challenges faced by woodworking educators across schools, colleges, and independent learning settings. The 52 responses are summarised as follows:

Time Constraints

- a. Lack of non-contact time for planning, maintenance, or personal development
- b. Too many students per class and insufficient hours to teach essential skills
- c. Pressure to cover administrative tasks, targets, and compliance detracts from teaching

Funding Challenges

- a. Chronic underfunding of:
 - i. Tools, materials, and machinery
 - ii. Technician hours and support staff
 - iii. CPD and upskilling opportunities
 - iv. Facilities expansion or upkeep
- b. High venue and operating costs (especially in cities like London)
- c. Barrier to student access due to course fees and lack of subsidies or bursaries

Curriculum & Qualification Design

- a. Qualifications do not reflect industry practice or workshop realities
- b. Not enough time allowed for deep skill development
- c. 'One size fits all' curriculum not suited to diverse student cohorts
- d. Lack of entry-level programmes that are fully funded and accessible

Declining Status of the Subject

- a. Design & Technology de-prioritised in schools due to:
 - i. Financial pressures (e.g. workshop costs, consumables)
 - ii. Emphasis on data and academic subjects
- b. Fewer students exposed to making or choosing it as a career path
- c. Misunderstanding of the subject's value by leadership and policymakers

Learner Needs & Support

- a. Increasing numbers of learners with SEN, neurodiversity, and behavioural needs
- b. No dedicated support staff or appropriate training in many institutions
- c. Learner engagement impacted by low literacy, numeracy, or motivation

Resources & Facilities

- a. Limited access to quality, modern equipment (e.g. CNC, up-to-date tools)
- b. Broken, blunt, or inadequate tools due to funding or shared-use challenges
- c. Small or shared workshops limit group sizes and learning experiences

Systemic & Logistical Hurdles

- a. Remote locations limit recruitment and collaboration
- b. Complex or outdated systems for booking rooms or managing resources
- c. "Tick-box" culture with bureaucracy taking precedence over pedagogy

"Time and money. DT is an expensive subject... most schools are moving away from it, not realising its incredible worth on the curriculum."

Proposed Woodworking Teachers Network

A final section of the survey presented a belief, held jointly by Sylva Foundation and The Furniture Makers Company, that connection and collaboration between teachers was extremely beneficial, including sharing knowledge and experiences, promoting safe working practices and striving for excellence. Also, that it was particularly valuable to support the next generation of teachers. We asked respondents their views on the concept of a *Woodworking Teachers Network*.

Among 55 responses, the vast majority of 40 teachers (73%) thought that the concept of a Woodworking Teaching Network was an excellent idea. 39 respondents were interested in joining and participating in an initial meeting to discuss this concept further. In terms of topic areas of interest, there were no clear emerging favourites among respondents for:

- Sharing experience and best practice in wood machine training, sharing near misses/accidents to disseminate learning and possible mitigations;
- Discuss the potential for establishing meaningful CPD;
- Examine gaps in training and explore opportunities to close them;
- Examine how both experienced and new teachers could develop by collaborating and sharing across organisations. e.g. mentoring or peer review;
- Explore how to attract a more diverse cohort of students.

Several other topics were raised by respondents which have been brought into the next discussion section.

Discussion and Conclusions

Respondents to the 2025 Woodworking Teachers Survey believed that woodworking and furniture education plays a critical role in personal development, heritage craft preservation, and preparation for a changing world of work. However, this field now faces significant challenges: funding cuts, resource constraints, qualification rigidity, and shifting cultural perceptions of the subject. At the same time, it holds transformative potential to connect learners with meaningful work, sustainability, and creative industries.

The next steps arising from this research will be the convening of a group of interested people, many of whom will have been respondents to the survey. The project partners will seek to explore and interpret the results with professionals working as teachers and tutors in the woodworking and furniture industries. Ultimately some high-level actions could include the following outcomes:

- a. Regularly convening of a national working group or strategic partnership initiative
- b. Scope a proposal for a centralised learning and collaboration platform
- c. Engage awarding bodies in pilot conversations
- d. Develop a sector-wide statement on the identity and role of woodworking education

Finally, exploring the qualitative feedback from this survey further revealed some key challenges and opportunities, which may be explored further as part of this ongoing initiative, as detailed below.

Reimagining the Identity of the Sector

Challenge: The term 'woodwork' is seen by some as outdated or reductive, especially when aligned with evolving Design and Technology curricula. There's a growing call to broaden the sector's identity to reflect:

- Cross-material and cross-disciplinary practices
- Furniture as design, not just craft
- The role of making in sustainability and wellbeing

Strategic Questions:

- How should we name and frame this field for the future?
- Can we adopt terminology that attracts new learners without losing tradition?

Infrastructure and Collaboration

Challenge: The sector currently functions in silos. Unlike trades such as Carpentry & Joinery, furniture education lacks:

- Shared textbooks, resources, or national standards
- A unified platform for knowledge and curriculum sharing

Opportunity: Establish a centralised national resource hub for:

- Teaching materials
- Assessment models
- Employer engagement frameworks
- Case studies of impactful practice

Strategic Questions:

- What platform or institution could lead this development?
- How can we support peer-to-peer knowledge sharing at scale?

Industry, Heritage, and Community Partnerships

Challenge: Courses often struggle to connect with employers, funders, and cultural partners consistently.

Opportunity:

- Leverage national organisations (e.g., National Trust, craft councils, sustainability NGOs)
- Formalise networks of “good” employers who offer placements, mentoring, or input
- Create pipelines between education, heritage crafts, and emerging sustainable design fields

Strategic Questions:

- How do we build mutually beneficial long-term relationships with external stakeholders?
- What role can the sector play in sustainable land use and heritage regeneration?

Reforming Qualifications and Delivery

Challenge: Many educators feel current qualifications are rigid, misaligned with workshop realities, or do not reflect students' progression pathways.

Opportunity: Collaborate with awarding bodies to:

- Explore modular, flexible, or project-based qualifications
- Develop new standards that better reflect modern practice
- Pilot alternate pathways for under-represented learners

Strategic Questions:

- What does a ‘fit-for-purpose’ qualification look like?
- Is there scope for co-design with awarding organisations?

Student Cohorts and Professional Networks

Challenge: Cohort fragmentation is a barrier to learning and long-term success. Community-building is under-resourced.

Opportunity:

- Embed models of student community and peer mentorship from the outset
- Foster networks that last beyond graduation—alumni, forums, exhibitions
- Use community as a career-launching support structure

Strategic Questions:

- How can we embed community values into course design?
- What kind of alumni and peer networks can we build?

Sustainability and Timber Supply

Challenge: There is growing pressure on timber resources and a lack of integrated sustainability education in some programmes.

Opportunity:

- Position woodworking education as a pathway into environmental stewardship
- Teach circular design, ethical sourcing, and regenerative material practices

Strategic Questions:

- How can our programmes address sustainability and resilience?
- What role does the craft play in circular or regenerative economies?

Appendix: Crafting Connections Seminar Report

Crafting Connections:

A collaborative seminar for teachers and technicians in furniture and woodworking

Tuesday 24th June 2025

Sylva Wood Centre



Introduction

On 24th June 2025, a one-day seminar was delivered by Sylva Foundation in collaboration with The Furniture Makers' Company. Sylva Foundation is an environmental and education charity, while the Furniture Makers are the City of London livery company and charity for the furnishing industry. The two organisations collaborated in conducting a survey of teachers and technicians. The outcomes provided us with subjects to explore during the seminar.

More than 30 teachers and technicians contributed to the event, representing a wide range of settings, including, Secondary Schools, Further Education (FE) colleges Universities, Charities, Private woodworking schools and independent teachers.

The seminar was hosted and facilitated by the Sylva Foundation team of Joseph Bray, Phil Gullam, Cathrin Poppensieker and Gabriel Hemery, with Chris Hyde representing the Furniture Makers Company. We adopted a combination of 30-minute interactive sessions including small group and round table discussions, post-it sessions and postcards.

The fast-paced sessions provided the opportunity to share and explore ideas. When reading this report please note that responses are not fully formed and resolved. It brings together the inputs of the 30 teachers and technicians who contributed during the seminar, we also recognise that it may not fully reflect the views of every individual or their institution.

The six sessions explored:

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1. Infrastructure and Collaboration

Introduction

In a community of teaching and learning woodworking/ furniture making, we are often isolated without a team of colleagues around us. As the subject shrinks across the sector, furniture departments are no more, and teachers find themselves without peers to share and learn subject specific knowledge. Our research shows an aging workforce with the majority aged 50 and over. Can new teachers access in-house subject specific support/guidance/mentoring? How could this be delivered across organisations?

With no new textbooks for decades, no consistency of projects and teaching resources being developed independently, could collaboration allow knowledge sharing at scale? What are the barriers to sharing resources?

We asked

How can experienced and new teachers develop by collaborating and sharing across organisations?

Outcomes

- A strong desire for **peer-to-peer collaboration and networking**, both online and in person.
- The need for a **centralised, trusted hub of high-quality, useful content** with a willingness to share resources and information.
- A call for **openness, inclusivity, and connectivity** within the teaching community.
- A wish for **structured, practical professional growth**, especially for newer teachers.
- The high value placed on **linking education with industry practice** for relevance and inspiration.

The overarching goal is to **build a supportive, connected, and resource-rich community of teachers**.

We asked

How can we support peer-to-peer knowledge and resource sharing at scale?

Outcomes

- Establish a **digital platform for resource sharing**, fostering collaboration and sharing across organisations. Including a library of resources, images, templates and teaching materials.
- **Visits and peer observations with feedback** between organisations promoting collaboration over competition.
- Ongoing peer-to-peer support through **mentoring**, and regular in-person and online **knowledge-sharing sessions**.

Barriers to sharing include time constraints, geographic limitations, concerns over the reliability of information, and commercial pressures that may hinder open exchange.

2. Curriculum: what's missing

Introduction

Whether delivering courses with a curriculum dictated by an awarding body, or schools designing their own syllabus, there are always debates about what is missing from a course. All courses and organisations have different aims, but what would make your teaching and learning better for your learners?

Perhaps there are subjects that are covered but you feel they would benefit from more depth and detail?

We asked

What are the gaps in our education and training delivery? And how can we close them?

Outcomes

Gaps	Solutions
A lack of basic woodworking training, particularly hand-skills, in schools.	Promote collaboration that enables students to access training in alternative settings. Provide training opportunities for schoolteachers. Explore ways to collaborate with schools to enable access to woodworking to ensure students can gain the basic skills expected for furniture making.
Government policy on supporting woodworking and furniture-making is limited, as the subject falls between the trades and creative industries, leaving it in a gap without clear focus or support.	Lobbying government Establishing an Industry body with national standards.
Support for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Develop better understanding and awareness of support needs by training teachers. Sharing accessible resources

Gaps	Solutions
How can we create a student-centred experience by offering opportunities for students to personalise the content based on their interests and needs.	<p>Less standardised assessment</p> <p>Offer a variety of pathways that reflect the individuality and diversity of the students.</p>
Qualifications are outdated and unable to adapt to changes in both the industry and the educational sector.	<p>Pressure awarding bodies to update qualifications.</p> <p>Collaborate to gain a better understanding of industry perspectives to identify the gaps they perceive in skills and training.</p>
How can we inspire young people to pursue the subject and attract students, especially those with a strong passion.	Reframing career opportunities and connecting with industry needs/skills shortages
<p>Prioritising practical skills over academic study.</p> <p>Including developing efficiency in making, enhancing commercial skills linked to employability, and incorporating project/production management.</p> <p>Delivering practical business studies including how to start a business, and professional practice.</p>	<p>Developing a work placement scheme.</p> <p>Including more time-based practical assessments.</p> <p>Collaborate with industry to co-deliver sessions that bridge the gap between the classroom and real world.</p>

3. Wood Machine training

Introduction

Best practice in wood machine training includes sharing near-misses and accidents to disseminate learning, close gaps and devise possible mitigations.

When teaching wood machine training, is it enough to be time-served, or experienced using machines? How do we stay up to date? Who trains the trainer? Are peer networks and professional conversations appropriate to maintain currency?

Working from the idea that we want to deliver excellence in wood machine training (fixed machines or power tools) we believe that sharing experiences is highly valuable. We all have accidents and near misses ourselves and while working with students, but what do we do with this information? In a safe, non-judgemental environment can we share this valuable information including mitigations to reduce future risk?

Sylva Wood School shared three examples using the Thicknesser

1. Accident

A 16mm thick piece of beech (x18mm x 400mm long) was pushed into the thicknesser with the bed set at 18mm. It was taken from the operator and pulled into the machine, but no material was removed. Subsequently the timber rotated through 90 degrees and was pulled up between the cutter block (spiral type) and the pressure bar. The outcome sounded like a gun going off as the beech shattered. On investigation we found that 16 cutters were shattered or broken, and 8 machine screws were damaged. There was damage to the pressure bar and tungsten carbide shrapnel throughout the machine. The accident did not result in any injuries.

2. Accident

When timber engages with the infeed roller it can kick upwards before immediately snapping down onto the bed causing a potential finger pinch point on the bed. On our machine there is also the possibility to pinch fingers above the timber depending on how the material is held. A student pinched his finger resulting in a bruise.

3. Near miss

An example shared with us when providing machine training to apprentices.

When thicknessing very long pieces of timber it is essential to assess the infeed and outfeed to ensure that the person 'taking off' does not get trapped against other equipment or workshop wall.

Actions:

All staff and students were brought together to share the accidents, discussing how it had happened.

The accidents were reported to our internal H&S committee for review

Machine training for the Thicknesser was updated to include reference to specifics of these accidents and the near miss.

We asked

Please share example of accidents and/or near-misses that have happened in your workshop.

Outcomes

Accident

1. 2 x accidents in 26 years when operating a drill while wearing gloves - don't wear gloves!
2. I've had objects in my eye many times - wear eye protection
3. A finger infection resulted in four days off work and two days in hospital - importance of cleaning cuts thoroughly.

Near miss

1. A student (not on a wood machine programme) used the spindle moulder without training or permission. He was shown 'how to do it' by another student who was also inexperienced and did not have permission.
2. A student who did not take information from presentations and demonstrations about the surface planer came into contact with the bridge guard when edging.
3. A student was using the surface planer and moved onto the thicknesser without first turning off the planer. The next person to approach the planer could not hear it running; they were wearing ear defenders in a noisy workshop. They failed to do a visual inspection and went to move the guard, just realising in time.
4. Eye rolling cultural response to health and safety from young people. Hair, Hijab, school uniform/tie potentially pulled into a machine. The risk of young people using machines without knowing enough about them to understand the risks they take.

Other feedback

- A solution - maybe bring a culture of being open minded about fatigue, anything can lead to an accident, not blaming people who don't feel using the machine.
- Accidents are a good learning opportunity. What happens when an accident happens?
 1. Gather everyone around to discuss what has happened.
 2. Identify why the accident happened and how things could have been done differently.
- Know your own machines and risk assess to British standards/ Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance. Set your own practices e.g. minimum piece size

- Design and Technology Association (DATA) offer training to standards. Design and Technology standards BS4163-21 and CLEAPPS - school standard risk assessment
- How can we share methods for getting inexperienced learners to respect the workshop as a dangerous place? This might help them to engage and actively listen to safety information
- Pressure on staff to closely supervise 20+ students
- How can I be responsible for and closely supervise 20+ students using hand and machine tools?

4. Industry, Heritage, and Community Partnerships

Introduction

Partnerships and collaboration are valuable in many ways, to our students and in support of our continued development as teachers. Some of us have multiple successful partnerships and others may like to develop them in the future.

Who do you work collaboratively with in the three areas: industry, heritage and community? How do you build relationships? And how does it provide benefits to you and your students?

Sylva Wood School examples of collaboration

1. National Trust

Professional Course students learn through making batch produced projects for partners in industry and retail, a good example is our ongoing relationship with the National Trust. Each year we take delivery of some homegrown Grown in Britain certified timber harvested from the Trust's woodlands and we convert it into a range of products. For three years we have produced the Ebworth range using ash from an estate in Gloucestershire. The income derived from sales makes the course accessible by keeping the fees as low as possible.

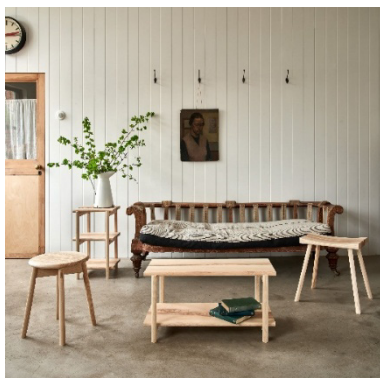
Our students benefit from the connection to a real customer, working to real deadlines and meeting an exacting quality standard. The National Trust benefits from the opportunity to tell positive stories about collaboration, supporting craft education and sustainability through something very tangible.

2. Gaze Burvill

Furniture maker Gaze Burvill has collaborated with the Professional Course for three years. As part of their application for B-Corp status they have committed to a regular annual project that supports education and community. In 2023 we utilised ash offcuts from their chair production to make a series of desk tidies. Our students benefited from a workshop visit, understanding the product development process and repetition of making through batch production. Gaze Burvill received a batch of products that are typically too small for their own production and told stories about circularity and reduction of waste.

3. Steering group - Woodworking and Gender Project

To support and guide the delivery of our Heritage Lottery funded Woodworking and Gender Project we formed a steering group. We successfully recruited female professionals from across the sector who guide the programme, provide expert insights and support. With their lived experience spanning a variety of roles within the sector, they offer a representation of the people our project seeks to help. They are ambassadors for our cause and Wood School, connecting us with education and industry, creating opportunities for our students.



We asked:

How and why do we build mutually beneficial long-term relationships with external stakeholders?

Outcomes

- **Real-world learning**

Collaborative live projects, industry collaborations, and community engagement (e.g., creating public seating) provide students with valuable real-world feedback, helping them build practical skills and meaningful portfolios that go beyond qualifications.

- **Career development and pathways**

Industry collaborations provide students with insights into diverse career pathways through visits, work placements, and internships, inspiring them, boosting employability, and supporting personal development and self-esteem.

- **Access to resources, knowledge and equipment**

Sharing resources like leftover materials and providing access to specialised equipment through taster days or partnerships ensures that students have the tools and knowledge needed for hands-on learning, even when schools face budget constraints.

- **Mutual benefit**

Projects and partnerships that provide benefit to both students and industry or community groups lead to more successful and sustainable long-term relationships.

The common theme, from our round table discussion, was that **collaboration between education, industry, and the community can provide valuable real-world learning experiences for students.**

5. Diversity within student cohorts

Introduction

The current picture:

- *The industry is ageing. Young people aren't entering in the numbers we need.*
- *The workforce, and student cohorts, are still overwhelmingly white and male.*
- *Recruitment is difficult. Retention is even harder.*

Why diversity is a strategic necessity:

- *Companies and workshops that embrace diversity see increased productivity, innovation, and morale. Mixed teams problem-solve better. Employees are more satisfied and less likely to leave.*
- *Diverse student cohorts bring new aesthetic traditions, lived experiences, and practical needs. That leads to richer design, more responsive furniture, and a craft culture that evolves with the world around it.*
- *More inclusive educational spaces make all students, not just underrepresented ones, feel more confident, safe, and collaborative.*
- *If we keep missing to attract a diverse student cohort, we are shrinking our future. If we want to grow the sector, we must make furniture-making accessible, attractive, and viable for people of all genders, ethnicities, class backgrounds, and abilities. That means removing structural barriers and opening doors with intention.*

What we're hearing from our survey and seminars:

- *Students from underrepresented genders often stumble across furniture making (courses) by accident, not through school or career advice.*
- *Many cited barriers like lack of confidence, financial insecurity, caring responsibilities, and a sense that they "don't belong."*
- *Not enough representation: "You can't be who you can't see!" A lot of current workshop culture (and marketing) can unintentionally reinforce these feelings of exclusion.*
- *Educators want to help but feel unsure how to reach and support new audiences.*

How can we reshape who has access, who feels welcome, and who sees a future in this sector?

We asked

How do we attract a more diverse cohort of students? What are the barriers to access our courses, who is disproportionately affected by them and how can we remove them?

Outcomes

Barriers	Who is affected	Solutions
Access to funding	Older students (particularly women) Those on low income	Bursaries to fund or part fund courses Shorter accessible courses Paid work experience/ opportunity to earn while you learn
Cultural norms, societal biases, and the perspectives of peers, teachers, and parents shape students' perceptions of the subject and career opportunities. The visibility of diversity within the sector also plays a key role in influencing these views and career choices.	Person of Colour (POC) Class Women Disabled people	Focused funding and grants Grassroots community initiatives Taster days Pathways at primary school age Visibility via social media, posters, marketing
Scheduling of courses (daytime) and a lack of flexibility.	Parents Carers	Change start/finish times Deliver teaching in blocks
Confidence	Under-represented people Neurodiverse people Those with Special Educational Needs	Taster days Bring a friend referral schemes (with discounts)
Health and safety around Pregnancy	Women	Review of guidelines and access to information
Location		Subsidised transport
Working environment		
Workshop culture		
Physical barriers to access workshops	Disabled people	
Job prospects: Poor levels of pay and low value of skilled practical work	Particularly freelancers	Union

6. Meaningful Continuing Professional Development

Introduction

What does meaningful subject focussed Continuing Professional Development (CPD) include and how can it be delivered?

Subject specific CPD can be difficult to set up for small teaching teams, with timing, cost and location being obvious challenges. What we want/need may not exist, and bespoke training may be uneconomic.

We asked

What are the subjects that we could explore as a network?

How can we collaborate to make sessions viable?

Outcomes

Whole group discussion focussed on the following four subjects:

1. Keeping hand skills sharp

- Could a 'skill build' type activity be established or teachers one-day activity that bring teachers together?
- Institutions need to free up time for teachers to engage in making projects
- Could a teacher work on live projects alongside students or with students?
- Any session should be appropriate for all teachers including school teachers

2. Neurodiversity/ Special Educational Needs training

- Institutions delivering funded training have regular access to this type of training whereas the private/charity schools do not.
- We attract significant numbers of students with additional needs and need to be able to support them better.
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles could be a useful resource

3. Forestry

- Opportunities to visit and engage with organisations who work in this sector
- Forestry for woodworkers one-day session at Sylva Foundation
- Open woods and workshops scheme by Woodland Heritage
- Online resources at CloudForest and Grown in Britain for homegrown timber

4. Visiting workshops and other schools

- Peer observations across the sector in different settings
- Teaching the teachers activities
- Buddy system for new teachers
- Collaborate with other schools
- Collaborate with other (educational) settings beyond woodworking

Other popular suggestions

- Different cultural views of craft
- Sharing teaching styles/methods
- Jig design and manufacture
- Veneering and marquetry training
- CNC CAD CAM



Suggested CPD subjects

Next steps

Round table discussion:

- We want to keep in touch with one another!
- A digital platform for communicating and sharing resources would be beneficial - suggested platforms included Discord, Whatsapp, Google or Teams
- In-person events are a good idea
- Engaging with mentors from within and beyond the sector can be beneficial
- Reciprocal support including training delivery, skills sharing and peer observation could be a low-cost opportunity.
- The group could be named 'Crafting Connections'

Sylva Foundation will provide:

- Forestry for woodwork sessions for teachers
- Support to establish next steps

Furniture Makers Company will provide:

- Funding and connections to support teachers in various forms of CPD
- Support to establish a skills challenge for teachers to 'keep hands-skills sharp'
- A CPD session focussing on how to assess excellence

Actions

- Issue the report of our survey and the seminar
- Establish an online group - test a platform and review in one year.
- Host our first online meeting
- Deliver another in-person seminar/event in 2026 - review with the aim of regular annual gatherings
- Seek wider funding to deliver activities/CPD

